

**Exeter Chiefs Rugby  
Academy  
Player Development Group**



**General Information  
2024-25**

## Welcome

Exeter Chiefs are committed to developing young aspiring rugby players across our region of Devon and Cornwall.

This document has been designed to provide you with answers to often asked questions that has arisen from previous seasons, it will explain to you the various phases of the Player Development Group Programme (PDG) and outline how this is in fact a collaborative effort to ensure that your player has an enjoyable and safe experience that will allow him to explore and flourish within the rugby environment. To put simply, our task is to help the players be the best that they can be – irrelevant of where they end up playing rugby.

## Staff Structure

Exeter Chiefs staff are dedicated to helping players, parents, coaches and stakeholders across Devon and Cornwall. Below are some of the staff and contact information for you to use should you require any additional information.



**Rob Gibson**  
**Academy Manager**

[robjibson@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:robjibson@exeterchiefs.co.uk)



**Marc Dibble**  
**Junior Academy Manager**

[marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk)



**Matthew Birbeck**  
**PDG Foundation Manager – Cornwall**

[mattbirbeck@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:mattbirbeck@exeterchiefs.co.uk)



**Lee Western**  
**PDG Foundation Manager – Devon**

[leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

### General Enquiries

[exeteracademy@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:exeteracademy@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

## **Education**

At Exeter Chiefs we are enthusiastic about our young aspiring players putting maximal effort into their education.

We have two education establishments affiliated to Exeter Chiefs Academy (Truro College in Cornwall and Exeter College in Devon). Whilst we have these two, we promote all players to attend the best education establishment that suits their educational needs and courses to enable them to pursue their non rugby futures.

We have a dedicated member of staff in Richard Hodges whose role is to provide unbiased information for players and parents on the best academic route within our pathway.

**Richard Hodges**  
**Education Advisor**

[richardhodges@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:richardhodges@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

## Background

Exeter Chiefs Rugby Academy is part of the RFU part funded National Academy regional organisation.

The Exeter Chiefs Rugby Academy boundaries include Devon and Cornwall.



Identification and development programmes have been delivered in the two counties for many years through the DPP (Developing Player Programme). This has been part funded by the RFU. Prior to that, the RFU Schools of Rugby delivered a similar county style programme and was funded independently.

2 years ago saw the RFU change the delivery model and the Academy take responsibility for a county style programme, where over 600 players were provided with a development programme based over 7 sites in the region, by over 36 volunteer coaches.

The actual cost was significantly greater than the monies allocated by the RFU, and the shortfall was absorbed by the Exeter Chiefs and the Academy.

Whilst the fantastic and valuable work carried out in this programme, the need for Exeter Chiefs to produce homegrown players has increased more so than ever due to further funding changes by the RFU.

## What is the Player Development Group (PDG)?

The boys' pathway is governed by the Professional Game Partnership and involves the RFU and Premiership Rugby working closely together. The responsibility for player development has been given to the Premiership academy system so it aligns to the top of the pyramid and ultimately the Premiership. The purpose of each academy is to produce players for the Premiership and England.

The Under 15 to Under 18 Age Grade Pathway comprises of two distinct phases: Foundation and Development.

## Foundation Phase

The Boys' PDG Foundation Phase is the first entry level point to the pathway and will include U15 and U16 age groups. It replaces what was previously known as DPP.

### Key outputs

- Reduced travel time
- Foster regional relationships
- Structured contact time
- National Curriculum
- U15 intra competitive opportunities
- U16 intra and inter regional academy opportunities

We will run regionally based sessions, to minimise travel time, throughout the season focusing on identifying players with potential and developing the skills and traits of these players. Sessions will be delivered by a mixture of full-time Academy staff and identified part-time coaches and will develop the athletic skills as well as the core rugby skills.

Playing opportunities for the U15 groups will be limited to internal games and festivals that allows each programme to run something bespoke for their players. At U16 levels these internal opportunities will continue with some external games and festivals added in.

To access the Foundation Phase, players are nominated through their club or school to the Academy. September to December the Academy will organise a series of events that allow the player to showcase their skills following which players will be informed if they are invited into the programme.

We ask clubs and schools to carefully consider their nominations and assess each player against the guidance we send out.

Remember, development is non-linear, and players thrive at different points as such programmes will accept previous and new nominations at various times during the season, the aim is to have multiple entry and exit points throughout the phase.

## Development Phase

The Boys' PDG Development Phase follows on from the Foundation Phase and will include U17 and U18 age groups.

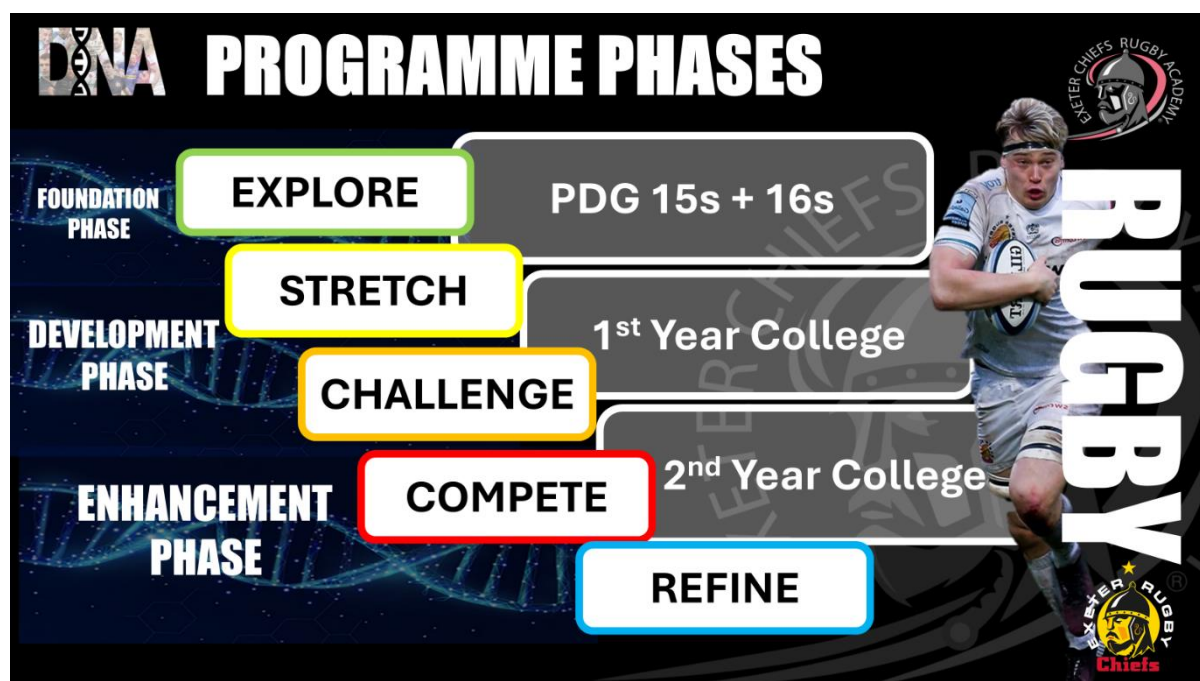
Key outputs

- U17/U18 Development driven by Individual Development Plans
- Post Christmas (January – February) U18 Academy activity flowing into U18 National age grade programme (March - April)

There will be a smaller group of players involved at this phase than previously. The focus will remain on identifying and developing players. Sessions will still be driven by the newly created national curriculum and will be delivered by full-time and sessional academy coaching staff.

The playing opportunities for this phase will fall into two distinct periods of the year. The first being in and around pre-season and then secondly post-Christmas, these will all be clearly articulated in the Age-grade Calendar. There will also be an Academy League that is run annually for the U18 age group.

Selection for the development phase will usually come from participation in the relevant foundation phase and not normally via open trials, however there will still be opportunities for players to join at a variety of stages if they are thought to show the potential required at the later phases.



## Exeter Chiefs Academy Pathway

The Exeter Chiefs Academy Pathway has been simplified in order for players, parents, coaches and stakeholders to understand and gauge potential entry points.

The pathway provides opportunities for players within the region to enter the pathway at any point throughout their development. The entry point will vary for all young aspiring rugby players due to the maturation point being so varied with young males.

The pathway is never a straightforward route; the journey will have bumps along the way. The bumps along the way also show resilience levels within players.



## How are players eligible for selection into the PDG?

To be eligible for selection into the PDG, a player must fulfil one of the following criteria:

1. Have their permanent home address located in our region
2. Have their permanent school address located in our region
3. Be registered on GMS as a player at a rugby club located in our region

## Where does PDG training take place?

We have four training centres in Devon and Cornwall - Exwick Hub, Truro College, Callywith College and Penryn College.

|                   |               |                    |                |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Exwick Sports Hub | Truro College | Callywith College  | Penryn College |
| Ennerdale Way     | College Road  | Old Callywith Road | Kernick Road   |
| Exeter            | Truro         | Bodmin             | Penryn         |
| EX4 2BQ           | TR1 3XX       | PL31 2GT           | TR10 8PZ       |

## PDG Season

PDG delivery is aligned to the National Playing Calendar and in each County Rugby Calendar.

The contact time is spread between the September to May for the U15's and a shorter programme, September to April for the 16's who then will be advised to solely focus on their GCSE's

## Player Feedback

Feedback is constantly provided by the coaches direct to the player during rugby activities. Players are also encouraged to self-evaluate against their strengths and development areas. Please see Individual Development and Reflection sheet for further information:



## Individual Reflection and Development

When reflecting there are many things to consider, here are some helpful ideas:

- Physical attributes
- Mental strength (thought process in pressure situations)
- Emotional (response to pressure – frustration, anger, enjoyment etc)
- Tactical attributes
- Technical attributes

Regularly reflecting is part of life and is done in many ways. Discussions in the car with parents, writing notes down, thinking about training or the game pre and post are all ways that people reflect. It is an essential part of development as it is the way in which we process the information, de scramble it and move forward with a better way of coping or doing things.

A great habit to get into after training and games is on the drive home not to talk about who won and who the best player was but talk to your parents in the car about specific things you did well and things that didn't go too well. Discuss why they didn't go well or why they did and come up with plan to make them better.

Below are some questions players could ask themselves post training and post matches. It doesn't have to be done every training or every game but is very much worth doing as often as you can. It might be worth writing down your answer to build a reflection log that coaches can go through with you.

1. What did I learn today at training?
2. Did I improve as a player? If so, why? If not, why?
3. What is the biggest area I want to work on in the next month?
4. What went well today?
5. What areas of my game did not go well and why?
6. What am I going to do in the next 4 weeks (specifically – session to session) to improve the above highlighted areas?

If a player or parent would like to speak to the coaches for specific, more in-depth feedback, please approach one of the relevant coaches at a session or alternatively email [marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk)



## Coach Development

Exeter Chiefs Academy ensure that all coaches have appropriate coaching qualifications. To support continuing professional development throughout the season, Coach Development sessions are arranged and attended by our coaches. The invite to these sessions is also extended to all community rugby coaches in our region (Devon & Cornwall).

For more information, please contact Lee Western – Exeter Chiefs Academy Coach Development Officer – [leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

## Player Safety

Rugby is a physical contact sport. Like all sports, injuries may occur as a result of an isolated incident or through the continuous playing of the game over an extended period of time. Safety is of paramount importance and it is therefore essential for those involved in the game to consider their own safety and the safety of other at all times. All those involved in the game should consider their own fitness before participating in any rugby activity. The parents and guardians of a player under the age of 18 should consider the fitness of those for whom they have responsibility. It is recommended to seek medical advice after injury and before recommencing any rugby activity.

Exeter Rugby Club will ensure that there is appropriate level of immediate care and/or first aid cover and equipment provided for the rugby activity that is taking place.

All players are strongly advised to obtain independent injury cover / medical insurance.

Exeter Chiefs Academy insist that all players wear a mouth guard during all activities.

All players must complete a Player Details Form before participating in any Exeter Chiefs Academy activity.

## **Concussion / HeadCase**

All head injuries with concussive symptoms will be treated in line the current RFU guidelines.

We recommend that all players and parents complete the Headcase e-learning module on the RFU website prior to participation of any rugby activity:

[HEADCASE | Rugby Football Union](#)

Please also follow the links below and read the World Rugby Concussion Policies and Education: your child's safety is paramount, and we feel that it is essential that parents and/or guardians also understand the dangers of and spot the signs of concussion. This will also reduce any misunderstanding between players, parents and coaches around the return to play protocol and the importance of following them.

[Laws](#)

[Concussion Guidance | World Rugby](#)

[Player Welfare | World Rugby](#)

## **Over Playing and Training**

It is recommended that a player does not play more than 5 games per calendar month and has 2 complete rest days each week. There should be no training and playing/training (double sessions) in the same day. Research suggests it takes 72 hours to recover from a match. Overloading as a youth athlete can have detrimental effects on your body in the long term.

Exeter Chiefs Academy promotes playing different sports but ensuring the 5-game recommendation is in place.

Parents/guardians and the player have overall responsibility on the amount played and trained. Any conflicts need to be brought to the Academy coaches' attention as it would be unreasonable for them to keep track of every player's playing commitments with school and / or club rugby.

To summarise:

- No games within 72hrs of the previous game
- No playing with injuries
- Make sure you have at least 2 complete rest days per week
- No more than 5 games in a calendar month

## Safeguarding

To view our Safeguarding Policy please click [here](#).

All Academy staff and DPP regional coaches have Enhanced DBS checks processed through and approved by the RFU.

**Marc Dibble**  
**Academy Safeguarding Lead**  
[marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Zoe Willmott**  
**Academy Safeguarding Assistant**  
[zoewillmott@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:zoewillmott@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

## Safeguarding Concerns

If you have any concerns about a child please report to the Club Safeguarding Officer (Mark Isaacs; [markisaacs@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:markisaacs@exeterchiefs.co.uk)), Academy Safeguarding Lead or contact the Devon RFU Safeguarding Manager whose details and contact information can be found on the Devon RFU website using link:

[Safeguarding – Devon RFU](#)

If you wish to file a safeguarding concern/incident the following link will be of assistance, it is the RFU Safeguarding form and supplies you with requests for specific information that the RFU will need to assist them in directing your concern to the relevant individuals/organisations.

[Safeguarding-Referral-Form.pdf](#)

## Mental Health Support

Exeter Chiefs Academy aim to keep the rugby community healthy by promoting healthy discussion around mental wellbeing and signposting those who need it, to expert advice.

The links between good physical health and mental health are well recognised. Physical activity such as playing rugby can be very beneficial for mental health and wellbeing as well as bringing physical benefits.

Exeter Chiefs Academy are here to support if you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health. We encourage you to seek support from our trained and caring staff who will assist and signpost you to the appropriate expertise. With our partnership with [Brave Mind](#), we have 12 staff members who are qualified Mental Health First Aiders.



**Rob Gibson**  
**Academy Manager**

[robjibson@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:robjibson@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Abi Birbeck**  
**Physiotherapist**

[abibirbeck@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:abibirbeck@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Daniel Johnstone**  
**S&C Coach**

[danieljohnstone@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:danieljohnstone@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Charlie Levick**  
**Academy Coach**

[charlielevick@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:charlielevick@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Tom Rawlings**  
**Academy Coach**

[tomrawlings@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:tomrawlings@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Lee Western**  
**PDG Academy Coach & ACDO**

[leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:leewestern@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Marc Dibble**  
**Junior Academy Manager**

[marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:marcdibble@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Keith Brooking**  
**Academy Coach**

[keithbrooking@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:keithbrooking@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Tom Kessell**  
**Academy Coach**

[tomkessell@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:tomkessell@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Davy Morgan**  
**Physiotherapist**

[davymorgan@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:davymorgan@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Lachie Surr ridge**  
**S&C Coach**

[lachlansurr ridge@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:lachlansurr ridge@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

**Zoe Willmott**  
**Academy Administrator**

[zoewillmott@exeterchiefs.co.uk](mailto:zoewillmott@exeterchiefs.co.uk)

## GDPR

To view the Academy Privacy Policy please click [here](#).

To view the Exeter Rugby Club Privacy Policy please click [here](#).

## Parents FAQ

1. What should a player wear/bring to PDG training/trials?
  - a. Training kit suitable for the weather conditions on the day and footwear for the venue you are attending (the footwear policy for The Exwick Hub can be found on the Academy page of the Exeter Chiefs website)
  - b. Mouth guard (Exeter Chiefs Academy insist that all players wear a mouth guard during all activities)
  - c. Water
  
2. What is my player's coach / teacher will not nominate him?
  - a. Discuss with your players coach/teacher why he may not have been nominated. If other players from his team have been nominated ahead of him, request some feedback. This should direct your player on what might he be able to work on.
  
3. Are players an Academy player if they attend PDG sessions?
  - a. The PDG is a big part within the pathway however we reserve the terminology of Academy to players that are contracted with Exeter Chiefs.
  
4. Will a player be removed from the programme if they miss a session?
  - a. No! Please just let your coach know if you are not able to attend.
  
5. Will players continue in their education?
  - a. Yes! It is essential players pursue their academic studies alongside their development as a rugby player.
  
6. Will Exeter Chiefs stop players playing for their junior clubs?
  - a. No. We heavily promote players to play for their clubs/schools throughout their development including those that represent Exeter Chiefs Academy age groups.
  
7. Will players become a professional rugby player and play internationally?
  - a. There are no guarantees – only a small number of players involved will progress to the professional and international game but the programme will seek to ignite a life-long passion for the game regardless of future progress.